

[Mr. Garrigus]

W15052

F. Donovan, Thomaston

Thursday, Nov. 10 '38

Mr. Garrigus: Your letter concerning Mr. Botsford arrived this morning. I went to see the old fellow and though I believe I explained what was wanted as tactfully as possible, he is absolutely opposed to the idea. He said he is perfectly willing to cooperate insofar as the history—factual or traditional—of the company is concerned, but that he does not wish to discuss his private life nor have any part of it that is not immediately concerned with his work used for publication. I asked him if he would still feel the same if his name were not used and he said that wouldn't make any difference. I suggested that it might be a fine gesture on his part to furnish the world with a lasting portrait of a fast-vanishing species—the Yankee clockmaker—but he refused to change his decision.

I have been thinking that you were to send him a letter fully explaining the purpose of the interviews—as you did me—it would aid materially. I could make a follow-up visit in a few days to sound him out again. It may be that my persuasive gifts are not of the best and that a written plea would more favorably impress him.

He had another anecdote for me today, though he says he has little left in that remarkable memory he hasn't told me. This one concerns a clock that was made for the Paris exposition.

“It was one of their finest jobs, nickel plated—every bit of metal—and polished till you could see your face in any part of it. It had a Westminster chime that was one of the sweetest tones I ever heard.

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“After the exposition they brought it back and I didn't hear any more of it for a while. But a few years later they had some kind of a small exposition in St.Louis. I took a trip down that way and I stopped at 2 St. Louis to see the exposition.

“I wandered around for a bit looking at this that and the other, and not very much interested in anything, when I heard this chime clock. Says I to myself 'There's only one chime in the world that sounds like that.' And upstairs I went in the direction the sound was coming from. Sure enough, there was the clock Seth Thomas had sent to Paris right at the head of the stairs.”

I asked Mr Botsford for further details on the tower clock that was sent to South America, but he knew nothing other than what he has told me. So I went to see Mr Albert Mellor, present head of the Tower Clock department. The entire department is being moved this week to the company's main plant and Mr. Mellor was unable to find necessary records offhand. He said however, that he would look them up and that I could have them 'some day next week.' I'll make a complete report on this subject as soon as possible.

I went to see Charles Saum this afternoon in the hope that since my last visit he might have recalled something [worth?] while. Mr. Saum is next to Mr. Botsford, I believe, in length of service with the company. Mr. Saum wants to talk about the difference in the way things are run at the factory these days when compared to the “good old days.”

“If the Thomases were still running it, us old fellows wouldn't be on the outside. They knew the value of experienced help. And when a man got too old to be much good on the bench, they'd use him to teach the newcomers.

“Believe me they could stand a few teachers there these days. They 3 haven't got anyone that can make anything.”

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(Mr. Saum voiced the objection of virtually all of the old timers to the new regime when he said they can't 'make' things. He has the skilled craftsman's scorn for the inept young machine operator who is helpless without the aid of modern conveniences.)

My father had the contract for lock work and drilling, and one of the first things I learned how to make was a drill. To do good work a drill should be hand-made. Before I was retired I used to see work spoiler right and left because of bad drills. But there's no use saying anything—they don't want to listen to you. One of the girls showed me one once, she said she couldn't get anything done with it. And no wonder—the cutting edge was above where it ought to be. Now everything they drill with tools like that is off center—bound to be.”

“They've cheapened everything these days. Make everything too damn fast. [They?] tell me they're making some of the wheels with square-topped edges—you know as well as I do wheels like [that?] won't run in a clock for very long. I'm telling you young fellow —“Mr Saum hesitated but plunged ahead like a man uttering heresy—“if I was going to buy a clock today I'd buy an Ingraham.”

“I can't remember a great deal about the old days—you said something about verse list time I talked to you and there's something come to my mind—you probably heard it a good many times yourself.”

And indeed I have, and it has probably been handed down for several generations, though whether it is peculiar to Thomaston or is prevalent in other industrial towns in variations, I cannot say. It is a bit of doggeral recited by school children here and goes like this: “Ashes to ashes Dust to Dust If the Case Shop Don't get you The Movement Shop Must. ”